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IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Applicant : Paul E. Massod
Serial No. : 09/334,574
Filed : June 21, 1999
Title : VERIFICATION PROCESS FOR DRY CLEANERS AND THE LIKE

Art Unit : 2876
Examiner : Diane Lee

BOX AF

Commissioner for Patents
Washington, D.C. 20231

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Brief
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2/13/03BRIEF ON APPEAL**(1) Real Party in Interest**

The real party in interest in the above application is the inventor, Paul Massod of Brockton, Massachusetts.

(2) Related Appeals and Interferences

The appellant is not aware of any appeals or interferences related to the above-identified patent application.

(3) Status of Claims

This is an appeal from the decision of the Primary Examiner in an office action dated July 17, 2002 finally rejecting 1-4, 6-16 and 18-36, all the claims of the above application. The Appellant's claims 1-4, 6-16, 18-26 and 34-36 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being obvious over Markman (U.S. Patent 5,794,213) and Appellant's claims 27-33 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being obvious over Markman in view of Amacher et al. (U.S. Patent. 4,716,281). A Notice of Appeal was mailed on December 16, 2002.

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(4) Status of Amendments

The last amendment was filed on September 17, 2002 and was not entered by the Examiner. The claims involved in this appeal are the claims as they existed prior to the amendment of September 17.

(5) Summary of Invention

Background

Often cleaning is performed on lots or batches of individual items or pieces that contain multiple customer orders. Manual assembly is used to assemble such lots or batches into individual customer orders or groups that are sent to retail dry cleaning establishments. In the typical manual method a worker examines a tag on a garment and manually places it on an assigned hook in an assembly station. The establishment can have an assembly station with a certain number of hooks. The worker matches a number on the tag or invoice to one of the hooks that was assigned to the number. Thus if a garment has a tag with number "185" the worker will place the garment on the hook that was assigned to number "185." (*Appellant's specification page 1 lines 5-13*).

Automated systems to group pieces of a lot or batch into individual customer orders are known such as those exemplified by U.S. Patents 4,550,246 & 5,794,213 by Markman (originally cited by Appellant). These assembly systems have an arrangement of pairs of lights. Typically, one light of the pair indicates what group to place an article in, whereas the other light indicates when the group has been completed. In such systems each pair of lights are associated with corresponding one of a plurality of assemble stations or hooks used to hold the garments during a grouping operation. A bar code reader is coupled to a computer system that controls the lights. In operation a batch of cleaning may involve a number of orders. The system is designed such that invoices and associated tags are coded e.g., by bar codes to the orders. Each of the lights is assigned to a group, and as the tag is scanned a light will go on to indicate the rack on which to place the garment. Thus, if the system has thirty pairs of lights and associated assemble hooks it can process for grouping thirty orders. In general the system needs one light pair for each order and thus a group corresponds to a customer order. (*Appellant's specification page 1 lines 14-30*).

Appellant's Invention

Appellants' invention is directed to inventory systems and particularly those adapted for dry cleaning establishments.

Rather than using an expensive apparatus to group items this invention is directed to an apparatus and method that verifies that grouping was done correctly, whether grouping was done manually or by an automated process. A large dry cleaning operation may have several people doing assembly. While, an automated grouping system could provide improvements in speed and accuracy and save on needed labor, for most dry cleaning operations this is not a great advantage. Most dry cleaning establishments are small having one or at most two people doing assembly. Therefore, the typical dry cleaner would not save on labor with an automated grouping system. (*Appellant's specification page 2 lines 2-12*).

According to an aspect of the present invention, inventory management includes verifying that articles belong to a physically grouped order with the articles having been physically grouped by a manual or automated grouping process into the physically grouped order. Verifying also includes scanning unique identifier codes on tags. Each tag uniquely associated with one article in the physically grouped order is used to determine that the article properly belongs in the physically grouped order. Verifying further includes positively indicating to an operator if the scanned unique sequential code does not correspond to an item that properly belongs in the physically grouped order.

Most dry cleaning establishments have developed efficient ways to manually assemble garment articles into orders. There are many ways to manually assemble. Small dry cleaners in particular have made a substantial investment in the manual systems that they use. This invention capitalizes on that investment. Rather than throwing away an established manual system to regroup, this invention establishes a verification system that can catch the infrequent but costly regrouping mistakes that occur. Although of particular advantage with manual systems, especially for operations of the size that cannot take advantage of any savings in labor in the automated system, it would also be useful for automated systems. (*Appellant's specification page 3 lines 5-16*).

References To The Specification

Referring to FIG. 1, a dry cleaning establishment 10 includes a front counter 11 where garments for cleaning are given to the establishment and the customer receives an invoice or claim ticket. The establishment 10 also includes a tagging station 12 where tags that are used to track the garment are produced and placed on the garments. The tagging station 12 includes a control device such as a computer system 12a for entering information concerning a transaction. The information that can be entered includes identification information that identifies the customer associated with the transaction, as well as information concerning the nature of the transaction. For example, information includes the number of pieces or articles that make up the transaction and which will be grouped together at the end of a cleaning process. (*Appellant's specification page 3 line 28 to page 4 line 11*).

The tagging station 12 also includes a printer 12b to optionally print a transaction receipt, and to print tags on demand that will be affixed to the articles. The tags include unique sequential indicia that include a group id associated with the transaction or customer, and a unique sequence number. (*Appellant's specification page 4 lines 13-22*).

The dry cleaning establishment 10 also includes a grouping station 16 and a bagging station 18. The bagging station 18 includes a verification system 20. (*Appellant's specification page 4 lines 23-29*).

At a grouping station 16, the dry cleaning establishment 10 manually assembles an order or uses one of the automated systems. At this point, the dry cleaning establishment 10 considers that the customer's order has been assembled and all the items in the group belong to that customer. (*Appellant's specification page 5 lines 3-11*).

The verification system 20 operates on an order, which was assembled either by an automated system or in most cases, manually assembled. The verification system 20 includes a computer system 24 that executes a verification process 40 (described in FIG. 3). The computer system controls a display indicator such as the display 26 or a light indicator system 30. (*Appellant's specification page 5 line 24 to page 6 line 3*).

The verification system 20 is used to verify that the grouping i.e., manual or automated assembly, was done correctly. The verification system 20 includes an indication device such as a display 26 and/or the light indicator system 30. The indication device, e.g., the light indicator

system 30 is used to indicate that the order is correctly grouped or that one or more pieces in the order are missing or were incorrectly grouped into the order. (*Appellant's specification page 6 lines 4-11*).

The light indicator system 30 includes two different indicators 30a and 30b, each preferably being a different color. One indicator 30a is used to indicate that articles are properly in the order and the other 30b is used to indicate a misplaced article or incorrect article in the order. To start the process an operator would scan either one of the garment tags 23 or the invoice itself, both having some machine-readable code. (*Appellant's specification page 6 lines 12-20*).

This verification system 20 allows verification of orders up to 50 pieces. If the sequence number is greater than 50, it indicates that the tag corresponds to the first piece in the order. When 50 is subtracted from the last two digits, the answer is the number of pieces in the order. Thus for an order of one piece, the number would be 51, for five pieces, the number would be 55, and so forth. By scanning the unique_ID verification is performed without the need to access the database or have a database anywhere local to the garment. By using this arrangement it obviates the need to look up in a database to find the number of items in an order. This provides a stand-alone verification capability and allows operation from the information on the garment tag 23 or invoice for verification. (*Appellant's specification page 7 line 32 to page 8 line 12*).

Referring now to FIG. 4A, the verification process 40 starts by an operator scanning 42 an invoice ticket or a garment tag 23. The verification process 40 receives and stores 44 the group_ID and encoded sequence number from the garment tag 23 or ticket that was scanned. The verification system 20 could cause the yellow light to turn on 46 indicating that verification of an order is in process. (*Appellant's specification page 8 lines 13-19*).

Referring to FIGS. 4B-4C, the operator can scan 52 a tag on a second garment. The process 40 will examine 54 the group_ID on the second tag and if the second garment belongs in the group, i.e., the group numbers are the same, and was not previously scanned 56 it will determine 58 if it is the first article in the group. If it is the first article in the group the process 40 will determine 60 the number of articles in the group. If it is not the first article, the process 40 stores 62 the group_ID and encoded sequence number from the garment tag 23 or ticket that was scanned. The verification system 20 could cause the yellow light to remain on 64 indicating

that verification is still in process and that the garment tag belonged in the group. If the process 50 determines 66 that the first article was previously scanned it will determine 68 the scanned article count and determine 70 if it is the last article. If it is the last article it will turn off 72 light 30a indicating that the verification process is complete. If it was not the last article it will return to 52 to await the scanning of the next article. (*Appellant's specification page 8 line 20 to page 9 line 6*).

If the process 50 determines 54 that the same item was scanned twice, e.g., through operator fault, (the operator was distracted or left to do something else and came back and did not recall whether the item had been scanned) the process 50 will cause the yellow light 30b to flash 80 or another indication could be used to signify that it was a repeat scan. In any event, the verification system 20 would not count the duplicate scanned item as part of the group. This allows the operator to leave the operation. The verification system 20 provides a visual indicator that can be displayed on the computer screen or could produce an audio output to indicate to the operator that the item had already been scanned but that the item is in the correct group.

(*Appellant's specification page 9 lines 7-19*).

As mentioned above, if the group is correctly assembled after the last item in the group has been scanned, the yellow light goes out. Turning off of the yellow light indicates that the order is now machine verified and correct. If, during the process 50 it is determined 54 that the tag ,which was scanned does not belong in the order, the verification system 20 causes 82, e.g., light 30b to flash. Light 30b could be a different color, e.g., red. (*Appellant's specification page 9 lines 20-27*).

With a two light verification system 20 an operator can tell that verification has been started, that the same item was scanned multiple times, and that the order is correctly or incorrectly grouped together. These features of the verification system 20 allows an operator to pause a verification operation and resume the verification operation at a later time. (*Appellant's specification page 9 line 28 to page 10 line 1*).

The operator keeps scanning until the grouped order is completed. The verification system 20 stores each of the unique_ID's scanned. The verification system 20 seeks to find 58 the piece having a number that is greater than fifty, i.e., the first piece. Until the verification

system 20 finds the first piece, and decodes the encoded ID, it will not know how many pieces are in the order. (*Appellant's specification page 10 lines 1-8*).

Once the process 50 finds the piece with the number greater than fifty, the process 50 takes that number and converts it into the number of pieces in the order by subtracting fifty from the number. Thus using a two-digit sequence number the maximum number of items that can be tracked is 50. However, larger digit sequence numbers could be used, e.g., three digits in which case 500 articles could be tracked and so forth. (*Appellant's specification page 10 lines 9-15*).

The verification system 20 verifies correct grouping of articles in an order, rather than assembling articles into a group. Thus, this verification system 20 can prevent the occasional error that occurs. For example with manual assembly, maybe a dry cleaning establishment 10 would have one or two errors a week while processing three or four thousand pieces. While the number of errors are small, these errors could be costly to the business because with such an error the business may have alienated a customer and may be liable to replace an expensive article of clothing. With this verification system 20 for a very small amount of time that it takes to verify, the dry cleaning establishment 10 can be confident that everything in that order belongs to that order. (*Appellant's specification page 12 lines 20-32*).

(6) Issues

The issues to be decided on appeal are:

Did the examiner proper object to claim 26?

Did the Examiner properly reject claims 1-4, 6-16, 18-26 and 34-36 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being obvious over Markman and did the Examiner properly reject claims 27-33 under 35 § U.S.C. 103(a), as being obvious over Markman in view of Amacher et al.?

(7) Grouping of Claims

Claims 1-4, 6-16 and 18-36 do not stand or fall together. Claims 1-4, 6-16 and 18-36 will be argued individually in groups as set out below.

(8) Argument

The examiner improperly characterized a rejection of claim 26 as an objection, and erred in rejection of the claim.

The Examiner failed to establish a case of *prima facie* obviousness under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) of claims 1-4, 6-16, 18-26 and 34-36, as being obvious over Markman, and of claims 27-33, as being obvious over Markman in view of Amacher et al.

Law

Obviousness

"It is well established that the burden is on the PTO to establish a *prima facie* showing of obviousness, *In re Fritsch*, 972 F.2d. 1260, 23 U.S.P.Q.2d 1780 (C.C.P.A., 1972)."

"It is well established that there must be some logical reason apparent from the evidence or record to justify combination or modification of references. *In re Regal*, 526 F.2d 1399 188, U.S.P.Q.2d 136 (C.C.P.A. 1975). In addition, even if all of the elements of claims are disclosed in various prior art references, the claimed invention taken as a whole cannot be said to be obvious without some reason given in the prior art why one of ordinary skill in the art would have been prompted to combine the teachings of the references to arrive at the claimed invention. *Id.* Even if the cited references show the various elements suggested by the Examiner in order to support a conclusion that it would have been obvious to combine the cited references, the references must either expressly or impliedly suggest the claimed combination or the Examiner must present a convincing line of reasoning as to why one skilled in the art would have found the claimed invention obvious in light of the teachings of the references. *Ex Parte Clapp*, 227 U.S.P.Q.2d 972, 973 (Board. Pat. App. & Inf. 1985)."

"The mere fact that the prior art could be so modified would not have made the modification obvious unless the prior art suggested the desirability of the modification." *In re Gordon*, 221 U.S.P.Q. 1125, 1127 (Fed. Cir. 1984).

Although the Commissioner suggests that [the structure in the primary prior art reference] could readily be modified to form the [claimed] structure, "[t]he mere fact that the prior art could be so modified would not have made the modification obvious unless the prior art suggested the desirability of the modification." *In re Laskowski*, 10 U.S.P.Q. 2d 1397, 1398 (Fed. Cir. 1989).

"The claimed invention must be considered as a whole, and the question is whether there is something in the prior art as a whole to suggest the desirability, and thus the obviousness, of making the combination." Lindemann Maschinenfabrik GMBH v. American Hoist & Derrick, 221 U.S.P.Q. 481, 488 (Fed. Cir. 1984).

Obviousness cannot be established by combining the teachings of the prior art to produce the claimed invention, absent some teaching or suggestion supporting the combination. Under Section 103, teachings of references can be combined only if there is some suggestion or incentive to do so. ACS Hospital Systems, Inc. v. Montefiore Hospital, 221 U.S.P.Q. 929, 933 (Fed. Cir. 1984) (emphasis in original, footnotes omitted).

"The critical inquiry is whether 'there is something in the prior art as a whole to suggest the desirability, and thus the obviousness, of making the combination.'" Fromson v. Advance Offset Plate, Inc., 225 U.S.P.Q. 26, 31 (Fed. Cir. 1985).

Discussion

Claim 26

Claim 26 was objected to because the examiner did not understand the use of the language "and/or." Claim 26 recites ... a printer to print tags having unique sequential identification for affixing to the articles and/or a ticket or an invoice. The use of this and/or language in claim 26 is a substantive aspect of the claim , affecting claim scope and thus should have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. 112, second paragraph. Hence, it is reviewable by the board.

Under 35 U.S.C. 112, second paragraph use of alternative expression is proper provide that the use is clear. Here appellant is claiming that tags having unique sequential identification can be affixed to the articles and a ticket, or to either the article or the ticket, or an invoice. There is nothing indefinite regarding this language and the claim is thus proper.

Claims 1, 2, 11-14, 23, 24 and 34-36

Appellant's claim 1 is representative of this group of claims. Claim 1 is directed to a method of inventory management.

According to claim 1 the method includes verifying that articles belong to a physically grouped order with the articles having been physically grouped by a manual or automated

grouping process into the physically grouped order. This feature is not described by Markman. Markman operates on ungrouped articles and seeks to group them. The Examiner contends that the reference teaches indicating to an operator if the scanned unique sequential code does not correspond to an item that belongs in the grouped order. The Examiner relies on column 5 lines 23+ and column 10 lines 66+. This contention is incorrect. Markman is dealing with ungrouped articles and tries to group them into plural groups. Markman does not operate on the grouped order.

Claim 1 also recites positively indicating to an operator if the scanned unique sequential code does not correspond to an item that belongs in the grouped order. This feature is not described by Markman. Markman neither describes nor suggests a positive indication that an article does not belong in a group. Rather, Markman teaches an indication that the article belongs in some group. Markman accomplishes this by specifying the location i.e., hook on which to place articles by activating a light over the hook to tell an assembler where to hang the article of clothing. The Examiner contends at page 7 of the office action that: "...the data processor selects the storage location 84 (i.e., already assigned to previous members of the group) by a signal to the corresponding indicator." (Emphasis supplied).

The recited feature of positively indicating that an article does not belong in a group is missing from Markman. First, indicating some group to place an article does not equate to positively indicating that the article does not belong in that group. Second, one could consider what would happen if an operator were to mix two different lots of groups. An operator can be grouping a first lot of items that corresponds to a certain number of groups of an order. All of the groups in that lot are assigned stations. The second lot would have all of the groups assigned to the same stations. Since the stations are all preassigned, when the operator is grouping the first lot, Markman does not have mechanism to positively indicate that an item from the second lot of groups does not belong in any group in the first lot. Rather, Markman would incorrectly assign it to some group in the first lot. Thus, there is no teaching of positively indicating that an article does not belong in a group.

Markman cannot verify that a subsequently assembled order or group was correctly done. Applicant points out in the specification instances where it is desirable to test if grouping of articles was done correctly. Thus, indicating to an operator if the scanned unique sequential code

does not correspond to an item that belongs in the grouped order is neither described nor suggested by Markman and serves to distinguish Claim 1 from Markman.

Claims 3, 10, 15 and 22

Claim 3 is representative of this group of claims. Claim 3 is directed to the feature of having tags that have unique sequential identification and scanning the unique sequential identification. Markman shows bar codes, but these bar codes do not have unique sequential identification because each bar code in Markman identifies a group. In FIG. 3, each group "U1234" receives the same bar code. Hence, claim 3 is neither obvious nor anticipated by Markman.

At Col. 8 line 66 to col. Line 16, Markman states:

Preferably, the identification of the group and the total number are recorded at least partly in optically scannable code 50 on the labels attached to each of the articles. FIG. 3 shows a series of exemplary article labels for a group 26 having four articles 24. Thus, the data input device 70 coupled to data processor 60, 44 includes a scanner for reading the scannable code 50. As shown, it is also possible to provide additional information on the label, such as an alphanumeric version of the group identification 34 and article count 52, for alternative keystroke data entry for labels which cannot be successfully scanned. A description of the article can be included, which is useful if a label should become detached and needs to be reattached to the appropriate article. Other information such as a code identifying the source of the order, e.g., a branch location served by a centralized cleaning facility, may be useful. A serial article count may also be included (e.g., "1 of 3," "2 of 3," "3 of 3," etc.).

No where does Markham suggest that the scalable indicia includes unique sequential identifications of the articles in the group.

Claims 4, 6, 16 and 18

Claim 4 is representative of this group of claims. Claim 4 is directed to a method of indicating to an operator if the scanned unique sequential identification corresponds to an item that belongs in the group. Markman makes no indication if the scanned unique identification

corresponds to an item that belongs in the group. Hence, claim 4 is neither obvious nor anticipated by Markman.

Claims 7-9 and 19-21

Claim 7 is representative of this group of claims. Claim 7 is directed to a method of determining if the scanned unique sequential identification corresponds to a first item that belongs in the group. Markman makes no indication if the scanned unique sequential identification corresponds to a first item that belongs to the group. Hence, claim 7 is neither obvious nor anticipated by Markman.

Claim 27

Claim 27 is directed to matching numbers scanned from permanent labels on the articles to either a group number or a permanent number associated with the permanent tags. The Examiner has rejected this claim with claims 28-33. Claim 28-33 are not dependent on claim 27 nor are they related. The Examiner has failed to point-out in Amacher and Markman the basis of this rejection. However, Appellant notes that neither Amacher nor Markman separately or in combination teach or suggest scanning from permanent labels on the articles to either a group number or a permanent number associated with the permanent tags.

In addition, neither Markman nor Amacher separately or in combination teach or suggest a method that verifies that articles, which were physically grouped previously, belong to the physically grouped order nor does Markman nor Amacher suggest positively indicating if the scanned article belongs in the grouped order. Hence, claim 27 is neither obvious nor anticipated by Markman nor Amacher.

Claims 28-33

This claim group deals with indicating to an operator that the verification process has started, ended successfully or ended unsuccessfully. Neither Markman nor Amacher separately or in combination teach or suggest a method that indicates when a verification process has started, ended successfully or ended unsuccessfully. Amacher teaches an indication of start, success or failure for a weighing process or a scanning process but not a "verification process."

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The Examiner has already acknowledged that Markman does not teach or suggest a method that indicates when a verification process has started, ended successfully or ended unsuccessfully.

In addition, neither Markman nor Amacher separately or in combination teach or suggest a method that verifies that articles, which were physically grouped previously, belong to the physically grouped order nor does Markman nor Amacher suggest positively indicating if the scanned article belongs in the grouped order. Hence, claims 28-33 are neither obvious nor anticipated by Markman nor Amacher.

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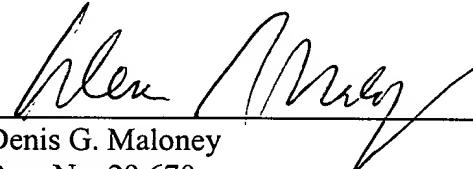
CONCLUSION

Appellant submits, therefore, that claims under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) of claims 1-4, 6-16, 18-26 and 34-36, are allowable over Markman and of claims 27-33, are allowable over Markman in view of Amacher et al., and that the Examiner erred in rejecting Appellant's claims and should be reversed.

The brief fee of \$160 is enclosed. Please apply any other charges or credits to Deposit Account No. 06-1050.

Respectfully submitted,

Date: 1/30/03


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Appendix of Claims

- 1. (Thrice Amended) A method of inventory management comprises:
 - verifying that articles, which were physically grouped by a manual or automated grouping process into a physically grouped order, belong to the physically grouped order;
 - examining codes on tags by scanning unique identifier codes on the tags, each tag associated with one article in the group to determine that the article belongs in the grouped order;
 - positively indicating to an operator if the scanned unique sequential code does not correspond to an item that belongs in the grouped order.--
- 2. The method of claim 1 wherein examining further comprises:
 - scanning the tags using a machine readable code device.
- 3. The method of claim 1 wherein the method conducted in a dry cleaning establishment, and the tags have unique sequential identification in a machine readable format and examining further comprises:
 - scanning the unique sequential identifications.
- 4. The method of claim 3 wherein examining further comprises:
 - indicating to an operator if the scanned unique sequential identification corresponds to an item that belongs in the group.
- 6. The method of claim 3 wherein examining further comprises:
 - indicating to an operator if the scanned unique sequential identification corresponds to an item that was already scanned and that belongs in the group.
- 7. The method of claim 3 wherein examining further comprises:
 - determining if the scanned unique sequential identification corresponds to a first item that belongs in the group.

8. (Amended) The method of claim 7 wherein if the first item has been determined, the method further comprises:

 determining a total number of articles in the group from the unique sequential identification of the first item.

9. (Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein determining further comprises:

 subtracting a base number from a portion of the unique sequential identification to provide the number of items in the group.

10. The method of claim 9 wherein the unique sequential identification includes a group identification portion and a sequential number concatenated to the group identification portion.

11. The method of claim 1 further comprising:

 grouping articles together into the grouped order that correspond to a transaction.

12. The method of claim 1 wherein examining further comprises:

 accessing a database to retrieve the number of articles in the group; and

 matching numbers scanned from permanent labels on the articles to either a group number or a permanent number associated with the permanent tags.

--13. (Thrice Amended) A computer program product residing on a computer readable media for use in a dry cleaning establishment comprises instructions for causing a computer to:

 verify that articles, which were physically grouped by a manual or automated grouping process into a physically grouped order, belong to the physically grouped order, wherein instructions to verify comprise instructions to:

 examine codes on tags and scan unique identifier codes on the tags, each tag associated with one article in the group to determine that the article belongs in the grouped order; and

 indicate to an operator if the scanned unique sequential code does not correspond to an item that belongs in the grouped order.--

14. The computer program product of claim 13 wherein instructions to examine further comprise instructions to:

scan the tags using a machine readable code device.

15. The computer program product of claim 13 wherein the tags have unique sequential identification in a machine readable format and instructions to examine further comprise instructions to:

scan the unique sequential identifications.

16. The computer program product of claim 15 wherein instructions to examine further comprise instructions to:

indicate to an operator if the scanned unique sequential identification corresponds to an item that belongs in the group.

18. The computer program product of claim 15 wherein instructions to examine further comprise instructions to:

indicate to an operator if the scanned unique sequential identification corresponds to an item that was already scanned and that belongs in the group.

19. The computer program product of claim 15 wherein instructions to examine further comprise instructions to:

determine if the scanned unique sequential identification corresponds to a first item that belongs in the group.

20. (Amended) The computer program product of claim 19 wherein if the first item has been determined, the computer program product further comprises instructions to:

determine a total number of articles in the group from the unique sequential identification of the first item.

21. The computer program product of claim 20 wherein instructions to determine further comprise instructions to:

subtract a base number from a portion of the unique sequential identification to provide the number of items in the group.

22. The computer program product of claim 21 wherein the unique sequential identification includes a group identification portion and a sequential number concatenated to the group identification portion.

23. The computer program product of claim 1 wherein instructions to examine further comprise instructions to:

access a database to retrieve the number of articles in the group; and
match numbers scanned from permanent labels on the articles to either a group number or a permanent number associated with the permanent tags.

24. (Thrice Amended) An apparatus for verifying inventory grouping comprises:

a scanner to scan codes on labels;

a computer having a computer readable storage media storing a computer program product comprises instructions for causing the computer to:

verify that articles, which were physically grouped by a manual or automated grouping process, into a physically grouped order, belong to the physically grouped order, wherein instructions to verify comprise instructions to:

examine codes on tags and scan unique identifier codes on the tags, each tag associated with one article in the group to determine that the article belongs in the grouped order; and
indicate when an article has been scanned previously.

25. (Once Amended) The apparatus of claim 24, further comprising computer instructions to indicate when an article has been scanned previously.

26. (Twice Amended) The apparatus of claim 25 further comprising:

a printer to print tags having unique sequential identification for affixing to the articles and/or a ticket or an invoice.

27. The method of claim 1 wherein examining further comprises:
scanning a ticket to retrieve the number of articles in the group or a specific permanent tags numbers in the group; and matching numbers scanned from permanent labels on the articles to either a group number or a permanent number associated with the permanent tags.
28. The method of claim 3 wherein examining further comprises:
indicating to an operator that the verification process has started.
29. The method of claim 3 wherein examining further comprises:
indicating to an operator that the verification process has ended successfully.
30. The method of claim 3 wherein examining further comprises:
indicating to an operator that the verification process has ended unsuccessfully.
31. The computer program product of claim 15 wherein instructions to examine further comprise instructions to:
indicate to an operator that the verification process has started.
32. The computer program product of claim 15 wherein instructions to examine further comprise instructions to:
indicate to an operator that the verification process has ended successfully.
33. The computer program product of claim 15 wherein instructions to examine further comprise instructions to:
indicate to an operator that the verification process has ended unsuccessfully.
34. A method of inventory management comprises:

verifying that articles, which were physically grouped by a manual or automated grouping process, into a physically grouped order, belong to the physically grouped order, wherein verifying comprises:

examining codes on tags by scanning unique identifier codes on the tags, each tag associated with one article in the group to determine that the article belongs in the grouped order; and

indicating when an article has been scanned previously.

35. The method of claim 34 wherein examining further comprises:

indicating to an operator if the scanned unique sequential code does not correspond to an item that belongs in the grouped order.

36. A computer program product residing on a computer readable media for use in a dry cleaning establishment comprises instructions for causing a computer to:

verify that articles, which were physically grouped by a manual or automated grouping process into a physically grouped order, belong to the physically grouped order, wherein instructions to verify comprise instructions to:

examine codes on tags and scan unique identifier codes on the tags, each tag associated with one article in the group to determine that the article belongs in the grouped order; and

indicate when an article has been scanned previously.